



TOWN OF BERWYN HEIGHTS

Prince George's County, Maryland

Incorporated in 1896 ~ Sixth Oldest Municipality in PG County

TOWN MEETING MINUTES NOVEMBER 11, 2014

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 p.m. Present were Mayor Calvo, Mayor Pro Tem (MPT) Kulpa-Eddy, CMs Dennison, Rasmussen and Schreiber. Also present were Town Administrator (TA) Cowles, Chief of Police Antolik, Treasurer Lape, and Clerk Harper.

Mayor Calvo led the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. MINUTES

Clerk Harper read a summary of the October 8 Town meeting minutes. On a motion by CM Dennison and second by MPT Kulpa-Eddy, the minutes were approved.

2. TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer Lape gave the Treasurer's report for the month of October.

3. MAYOR'S REPORT

Mayor Calvo noted that TA Cowles completed her first month in office and brought a new perspective to how things are done in the Town office and the department. It is likely to result in changes in the short and long term. TA Cowles also made it a point to engage with directors and staff to learn about their work and concerns.

Mayor Calvo reported that, after the hiring of the contractor in October, ground was finally broken for the priority 1 sidewalks project. The interaction with the contractor continues. Last week, he and TA Cowles walked the length of the future sidewalks with the engineers and the contractors to discuss difficult location and head off potential problems. Minimizing tree removal and improvements of the intersection of 57th Avenue at Pontiac Street were among the issues discussed.

At the last Town meeting, the Town received a detailed update on the FBI headquarters relocation from the developer of Greenbelt Station, followed by a meeting with College Park with Congressman Hoyer's staff, which he attended. Hoyer's office has been steadfast in supporting the relocation to Greenbelt Station and excellent coordinating with the nearby municipalities. A decision on awarding the location of the headquarters will not be made before spring 2016. Meanwhile, federal and state representatives of the Town should be reminded at every opportunity how important this decision is and continue to advocate for it. The Town recently authorized contribution towards the production of a video to showcase the communities surrounding Greenbelt Station. It is hoped this will help win over FBI employees for relocation to Greenbelt.

Mayor Calvo said that he continues to check with the County's Department of Environmental Resources (DER) about a study for an animal shelter for the River corridor. The County has appropriated \$180,000 for the study but so far has not taken any further steps. The Town has appropriated \$10,000 in its FY 2015 budget towards the study, and other municipalities in the area have also pledged their support.

WSSC will give a presentation at the December Town meeting about the Indian Creek Storm Water Replacement project that will take place next summer, and affect a large number of streets in Town. The Town is looking into the possibility of piggybacking onto WSSC's contract to get some needed street repairs done. Calvo is also in touch with WSSC regarding their review of sewage backups resulting from the June 10 flash flood. The interaction with Town residents, who apply for refunds, has been less than forthcoming.

Mayor Calvo reported on how Berwyn Heights voted in the recent gubernatorial elections: For governor - Anthony Brown 433 votes, Larry Hogan 285 votes, independent candidate 14 votes. For state delegates - Tawanna Gaines 492 votes, Ann Healey 484 votes, Alonzo Washington 448 votes, Lynn White 255 votes. District 2 school board representative - Lupi Grady 402 votes, Peggy Higgins 219 votes. District-wide Ms. Grady defeated incumbent Peggy Higgins to become the school board representative.

Further, on November 20, the Town Council will hold its annual legislative dinner and meet with all its state and local representatives, including, for the first time, a school board representative. This will be an opportunity to 'say thank' you to County Councilmember Eric Olson after his 8 years of dedicated service. He was replaced by his former Chief of Staff Danielle Glaros. On December 2, the Prince George's County Municipal Association (PGCMA) will hold its annual legislative dinner and vote on its legislative priorities. Municipalities have been polled about their top priorities. Municipal tax differential and WSSC communication rank at the top.

The Town-wide clean up that took place last Saturday was a great success. Some 40 large bags of trash were collected. The next event is the always popular Holiday Lighting on December 6, hosted by the Seniors, at which all residents are welcome.

4. DEPARTMENT REPORTS

Administration: MPT Kulpa-Eddy noted that, with the sidewalks project underway, there may be temporary parking and driveway access problems where construction is taking place. The FY 2014 audit has been completed and the emergency generator project is going out to bid. The Four Cities Coalition received a grant to offer income residents free spay and neuter service. Interested residents should contact the City of Greenbelt.

Code Compliance: CM Rasmussen congratulated the winners of the recent election and thanked Peggy Higgins for her service on the Prince George's County Board. He also thanked Mayor Calvo, TA Cowles and Director Lockley for listening to his many messages about preserving the Town's tree canopy.

CM Rasmussen reported on 4 code appeals the Council heard at last worksession. The appeals resulted in part from the new approach taken by the new Supervisor in enforcing existing rental housing codes. They all related to missing and incomplete papers in the rental license application process. In two cases the appeals were upheld, in one case the fine was reduced, and in another case the fine was reversed. The appeals were helpful in identifying areas for streamlining the license application process, and the Council voted to suspend certain requirements in filling out the application forms: 1) floor plans are no longer required to dimensions for all rooms, only bedrooms, which must have a prescribed minimum size; 2) forms, such as the Tenants Rights & Responsibilities Forms, no longer to be submitted every year if the tenants do not change; and 3) tenant signatures on applications will only be required of a head of household if the tenants are a family. Minors are not required to sign any documents.

CM Rasmussen further noted that Code Supervisor Simpson has filed the purchase order for the new code violation tracking software. Once the software has been procured it will take approximately 2 months to fully implement, including data transfer and training. CM Rasmussen noted that he suggested to the Councilmembers that goats might be used to eradicate "phragmites," an invasive grass found primarily in wetlands. He has since been informed that the town ordinances forbid the keeping of livestock.

Parks and Recreation, Education and Civic Affairs: CM Dennison noted that the contingent of women serving in the United States Congress will for the first time reach 100 with the election of Alma Adams (D-NC) in the recent congressional elections. She also reported the winners of the Trunk or Treat Halloween event - 1st Place - the Wolfinger family; 2nd Place - the Buker family; 3rd Place - the Stevens family. Last Sunday's Veteran's Day event was well attended, but the speaker, Maya Davis, was unable to give a presentation on Slavery during the War of 1812, because she was in the hospital. However, the guests did get to see a break dance by Antwan McDonald, grandson of Karate teacher Leon Swain.

Mayor Calvo commended the Higgins family, last year's Trunk or Treat winners, who were back with another great display.

Public Health and Safety: Chief Antolik thanked the Neighborhood Watch/ Emergency Preparedness Committee for assisting the police patrolling the Town Halloween. There was a great turnout of trick-or-treaters and the police handed out 500 glow sticks. Then he gave the police activities report for October. There were 1 Part I offenses, as opposed to the 5 year average of 5.6. The year to date total is 56, also lower than the 5 year average of 67.8. The police issued a total of 181 and State citations, and 97 speed camera violations, all of them on Greenbelt Road.

Chief Antolik continued that two of the Part I offenses were armed robberies, one at the 7 Eleven on Edmonston Road and one at a Doctors office in the m building at 6200 Greenbelt Road. The 3rd offense was a theft of a wallet from a parked car. Residents are reminded not to leave any valuables in their cars in sight. Chief Antolik remarked that he also had a chance to visit with Officer Krouse's family and meet his newborn daughter, Elena. He concluded with safety tips for the upcoming Thanksgiving holidays.

Mayor Calvo commented that he noticed many ladders lying in yards and leaning against trees. He suggested the police tell those home owners that they might be used to break into homes if left out for long periods. CM Rasmussen asked if the uptick in thefts from cars represents a trend. Chief Antolik replied that these often occur during holidays and mostly from cars where valuables are left in plain sight.

Public Works: CM Schreiber commended Emerson Ellis for being chosen as the employee of the month for October. Further, he reported that Public Works added gravel to the 58th and 60th Avenues footpaths and has begun loose leaf collection. Residents are requested to rake leaves close to the curb but not into the street. Leaves in plastic bags are no longer accepted. Residents are also reminded not to place recyclables in opaque plastic bags because the Prince George's rec facility does not compensate the Town for them. Residents can request additional recycling containers from the Public Works Department if needed.

5. COMMITTEE REPORTS

Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness: MPT Kulpa-Eddy thanked the police for ensuring another safe Halloween night, and announced a CERT training class held on November 15 in Cheltenham. Anyone interested in signing up for two remaining seats should contact her or the Town office. Residents are requested to respond to a brief emergency preparedness survey that is still posted on the Town website. The next NW/EP meeting is on December 3.

6. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There was none.

7. NEW BUSINESS

Ordinance No. 107 - 1st Reading & Introduction of Clean Lot Ordinance Amendments: Mayor Calvo asked for a motion to consider the Ordinance read as written with no resolution to introduce the amendments. CM Dennison so moved. CM Rasmussen seconded. The motion passed 5 to 0. CM Dennison then moved, and CM Rasmussen seconded to introduce the amended Ordinance 107. Mayor Calvo gave an overview of the proposed amendments. He said that the revised Clean Lot Ordinance covers a lot of ground and proposes to adopt a number of new standards, on which the Council would like to receive feedback from residents. The important changes are to:

1. Tighten the time lines for correcting repeat violations. The current Ordinance already has a separate time line for repeat offenders. Property owners cited for a Clean Lot violation go on a repeat offenders list, and if they receive a second violation within a given time frame they must correct the violation within a shorter 7 day period before a fine is issued. The revised Ordinance proposes to authorize the Code Department to issue immediate fines for multiple repeat offenders, that is, property owners with at least 3 Clean Lot violations incurred within a given period.
2. Implement a new process for removing abandoned vehicles that have been sitting on a private property, often a vacant property, for a long time without being used, as well as setting new standards for storing unregistered vehicles on a private property. These rules aim to end the practice of covering inoperable unregistered vehicles with unsightly tarps and the possibility that they become havens for infestations of insects and wild animals.
3. Hold property owners, who have bamboo or other invasive plants, responsible for confining the plants to their yards.
4. Strengthen enforcement of neglected or unsafe accessory structures, such as fences and retaining walls. The Code Department will be authorized to ask owners to fix or remove fences that are in disrepair, as well as make plans, in collaboration with the Code Department, to abate unsafe accessory structures, such as retaining walls that are expensive and time-consuming to repair.
5. Institute a formal process for abatement by the Public Works Department of vacant properties that are not well maintained, and recovering the cost by billing the property owner, or by placing a lien on the property.
6. Institute a process by which the Town can demolish condemned homes using Town funds, which would be recovered through the lien process. To date, the Town has used the County process for demolishing condemned homes, which can take years to be completed.
7. Revise and clarify the system of notices and fines for code violations in order to tighten enforcement and focus on repeat offenders.

Mayor Calvo said that the proposed amendments will affect all property owners in Town and he hopes that there will be constructive feedback. The Ordinance with lined changes will be posted on the Town website for public review and comment. Residents are also encouraged to share comments at worksessions or the hearing scheduled for the December 10 Town meeting. In response to CM Rasmussen, Mayor Calvo said that the introduced version of Ordinance 107 will be further revised at worksessions and based on public comments received before its adoption. Adoption is planned for the January Town meeting.

Without further comments, the Ordinance was introduced in a 5 to 0 vote.

8. CITIZENS DISCUSSION

There was none.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper, Town Clerk*

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